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AFTER 'CONSULTATION'

Marines Sent in '65 Before Saigon Asked

The first U.S. combat troops were already en route to South Vietnam, as a result of consultation between Saigon and Washington, before any formal South Vietnamese request for them was officially recorded, government documents show.

A communique from the office of South Vietnamese Premier Phan Huy Quat on March 7, 1965, said his government "has asked for, and obtained the agreement of the American government" to send two Marine battalions.

Their dispatch already had been announced in Washington, and they began landing at Da Nang the next day.

This communique was cited by the State Department in a reply Sept. 2 to a query May 12 from Sen. J. William Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Fulbright, a critic of U.S. policy in Vietnam, had asked for copies of any "formal request from the South Vietnamese government for U.S. intervention with combat troops."

The State Department reported

edly was unable to turn up any formal request. But its reply, signed by H. G. Torbert Jr., acting assistant secretary for congressional relations, said the decision to send the Marines was "made in close and constant consultation with the government of Vietnam."

The analysis by U.S. and South Vietnamese officials of the situation created by the deployment of North Vietnamese regular troops in the south from late 1964 onward, Torbert wrote, "and the consultation and agreement thereon, were such as to be regarded by our government as constituting a request. . . ."

"This request was confirmed" by the premier's communique later, Torbert wrote.

In inserting his request and the reply into the Congressional Record on Sept. 12, Fulbright commented:

"It is shocking to realize that Congress was not asked for specific authority for the sending of American soldiers to South Vietnam and, indeed, that the government of South Vietnam itself did not make a written, formal request for these troops."